

UPPER EAST



Background and Location

The Upper East Region of Ghana is located in the northeastern corner of the country between longitude 00 and 10 West and latitudes 100 30"N and 110N and bordered by Burkina Faso to the north and Togo to the east the west by Sissala in Upper West and the south by West Mamprusi in Northern Region. The capital is Bolgatanga, sometimes shortened to Bolga. Other cities include Bawku and Navrongo. In area, the Upper East Region is 8842 square kilometers. In 2002, its population was 964,500.

The land is relatively flat with a few hills to the East and southeast. The total land area is about 8,842 sq km, which translates into 2.7 per cent of the total land area of the country.

Historically, the Upper East Region is part of what used to be the Upper Region (Upper East and Upper West), which was itself carved out of what used to be the Northern Region on 1st July, 1960.

From 1902 the old Northern Territory was a British protectorate until 1960 when it was separated into the Northern and Upper Region. The Upper Region was later apportioned into Upper East and Upper West in 1983 during the PNDC rule.

The process actually started in 1980 when what eventually became Upper West was run on an experimental base as a semi-autonomous region with Wa as the administrative centre, even though the Upper Regional Minister at Bolgatanga exercised overall responsibility.

The major ethnic groups are the Bimoba, Bissa, Buli, Frafra, Kantosi, Kasem, and Kusasi.

The geography is primarily savanna grassland. The climate is very dry.

Political and Administrative Structure

The region is administered politically from Bolgatanga. The main administrative structure at the regional level is the Regional Co-ordinating Council (RCC), headed by the Regional Minister. Other members of the RCC include representatives from each district assembly, regional heads of decentralized ministries, and representatives of the Regional House of Chiefs.

Each district is administered by a Municipal/District Assembly headed by a Chief Executive nominated by the President and approved by a two-thirds majority of the Assembly Members present and voting. Two-thirds of the members of the Assembly are directly elected. The other one-third is appointed by the Central Government. Members of Parliament are exofficio members of the Assemblies of the districts in which their constituencies are located.

There is also effective traditional leadership and vibrant Youth Development Associations to facilitate efficient and effective mobilization of local resources. Within the region there are currently twelve (12) political parliamentary constituencies.

Economy and Tourism

The region's economy is based on agriculture, primarily cattle and cereals like millet, sorghum and rice. The region is also known for its handicrafts and a locally brewed beer known as Pito. The market at Bolga has a long history. The ancient trans-Saharan trade routes from Mali, which passed through Burkina Faso, was joined in Bolga by a second route, from northern Nigeria through Bawku, and continues down to Tamale and southern Ghana. At the Bolga market, visitors can buy straw hats, baskets, leather goods, metal goods, and traditional clothing.

The main occupations in the region in order of magnitude are, agriculture and related work (65.9%), production and transport equipment work (14.5%), sales work (9.5%) service work (3.9%), and professional, technical and related work 3.8 per cent. The five together make up 97.6 per cent of all occupations. The occupational structure of the region is thus not very diverse.

The substantial lack of formal sector, office based bureaucratic activities in the region is reflected in the fact that only 1.7 per cent of the economically active are engaged in administrative, managerial, clerical and related work. About two out of every three are in agriculture (66.4%).

The rank order of the five occupations is same for males and females. The proportion of females in sales work (13.3%) is twice that of males (5.8%). The proportion of males in agriculture is 71.8 per cent compared with 61.2 per cent females.

A total of 69,094 children of school going aged 7-14 years are reported to be working fulltime. The majority (54.5%) of them are boys. The number of children working represents a little over one in three (34.0%) of the total population aged 7-14 years. The proportion of males of school going age who are working is 35.3 per cent and that of females is 32.7 percent.

The fact that children at these ages are already gainfully employed is a reflection of the extent of child labour in the region. Almost all of these children are engaged in agriculture (77.9%), production and transport equipment (9%), service work (8%) and sales work (4.4%).

The working children are almost entirely in the private informal sector and are either selfemployed without employees (63.1%) or are unpaid family workers (29.8%); about five per cent are employees. Contrary to the popular perception that children are used as househelp, child domestic employees make up only 3 per cent while other employees make up 1.7 percent.

As in other parts of Ghana, colonialism and slave trade are part of the history of the Upper East Region. The area offers insight into this history through guided tours and visits to former slave camps. In Wadnaba, a visitor can enter a hollow baobab tree in which potential slaves were held captive. In Paga Nania, 3 km west of Paga, is a slave transit camp and relics of the slave trade. From the 16th century when slaves became a dominant item of trade, Nania became the first stopover and auction market for slaves captured in Mossi and surrounding lands.

The market was in a rocky area referred to as "Pinkworo" (Rocks of Fear). Still evident today is the rock outcrop that was used as an observation post by the raiders, water troughs formed in the rocks from which slaves drank, grinding stones and indents in the rocks, where slaves ground cereals for food.

One unique site in the region is the Tongo Whistling Rocks. Located 6 miles (10 km.) from Bolgatanga, these granite rocks jut dramatically from the terrain. The rocks also make strange whistling

sounds during November and December, when the harmattan wind blows off the Sahara through the Northern Region.

The region also plays host to many festivals throughout the year. Most festivals are either to bring a good planting season or celebrate the harvest. Festivals include the Gologo Festival, celebrated in March by the Talensis of Tong-Zug just before the planting of grain, and the Fao Festival, held between November and March in the Paga/Chiana and Kayoro Traditional Areas as a thanksgiving offering for good harvest.

Soil and Drainage

The region's soil is "upland soil" mainly developed from granite rocks. It is shallow and low in soil fertility, weak with low organic matter content, and predominantly coarse textured. Erosion is a problem. Valley areas have soils ranging from sandy candy loams to salty clays. They have higher natural fertility but are more difficult to till and are prone to seasonal waterlogging and floods. Drainage is mainly by the White and Red Volta and Sissili Rivers (Regional Coordinating Unit, 2003).

Vegetation

The natural vegetation is that of the savannah woodland characterised by short scattered drought-resistant trees and grass that gets burnt by bushfire or scorched by the sun during the long dry season. Human interference with ecology is significant, resulting in near semi-arid conditions. The most common economic trees are the sheanut, dawadawa, baobab and acacia.

Climate

The climate is characterized by one rainy season from May/June to September/October. The mean annual rainfall during this period is between 800 mm and 1,100 mm. The rainfall is erratic spatially and in duration. There is a long spell of dry season from November to mid February, characterized by cold, dry and dusty harmattan winds. Temperatures during this period can be as low as 14 degrees centigrade at night, but can go to more than 35 degrees centigrade during the daytime.

Humidity is, however, very low making the daytime high temperature less uncomfortable. The region is entirely within the "Meningitis Belt" of Africa. It is also within the onchocerciasis zone, but with the control of the disease, large areas of previously abandoned farmlands have been declared suitable for settlement and farming.

Post and Telecommunications

Postal services are available in large settlements (Bolgatanga, Bongo, Zebilla, Navrongo, Sandema and Bawku). Telecommunication linkages are also available at Bolgatanga, Navrongo, Sandema Bongo and Bawku. Linkages of district capitals are poor and in some cases not operational e.g. Bongo and Sandema. Private communications centres have sprung up, especially in Bolgatanga, Navrongo and Bawku. Teledensity (phones/per 100 populations) is very low in the region (0.1) compared to the national density of 0.7).

Nationality And Ethnicity

Ghanaians by birth or parenthood constitute 92.5 per cent of the population of the region. Naturalized Ghanaians constitute 5.3 per cent and the rest are non-Ghanaians. There are far fewer non-Ghanaians (2.1 percent) than naturalised Ghanaians.

The main ethnic groups in the region are the Mole-Dagbon, Grusi, Mande-Busanga and Gurma. Among the Mole-Dagbon, the Nabdam, Kusasi, Nankani/Gurense and Builsa are significant. The significant other subgroups are the Kassena among the Grusi, the Busanga among the Mande-Busanga and the Bimoba among the Gurma.

The regional picture however changes, depending on the base district of the ethnic groups. The Nabdam who form 30.5 per cent of the region's population, make up 94.2 per cent of the population of Bongo and 83.8 per cent of the population of Bolgatanga. The Builsa, who constitute 7.6 per cent of the region's population, make up 84.1 per cent of the population of Builsa. The Kassena and the Nankani, who make up 15.7 per cent of the region's population, together make up 88.3 per cent of the population of Kassena-Nankana.

The Kusasis make up 22.6 per cent of the region's total population, but they make up about 75 per cent of the population of Bawku West and 47.6 per cent of the population of Bawku East. The Busanga also make up about 6 per cent of the region's population and are mostly in Bawku East (15.4%) and Bawku West (7.8%).

The Mamprusi comprise only 1.8 per cent of the region's population. They are thinly spread in the districts. The highest concentration is in the Bawku East district where they comprise 3.7 per cent of the population. However, the two adjacent districts in the Northern region, which are located to the South of Bawku East and Bawku West, are mostly Mamprusi.

Bawku East is the most mixed district in terms of ethnic groups. Only the Kusasi and the Busanga constitute more than ten per cent of the population. The two ethnic groups account for 63 per cent of the population. The remaining 37 per cent is made up of over thirty other ethnic groups, including the Bimoba and the Mamprusi. The socio-cultural problems that can arise as a result of the ethnic diversity of Bawku East often manifested in the many ethnic conflicts in the district.

Religious Affiliation

Three main religious groupings are found in the region, namely the Traditional (46.4%), Christianity (28.3%) and Islam (22.6%). Builsa has the highest proportion of Traditionalists (63.7%) followed by Bawku West (61.9%). The lowest proportion (26.8%) is in Bawku East where Islam (51.1%) is the predominate religion.

The second major religion is Christianity, constituting of 28.3 percent; it is not predominant in any district. Within the Christian religion, the Catholics are in the majority. This is explained in terms of the work of the Order of the White Fathers who arrived in Navrongo in 1906 and began proselytizing the northern territories.

Following the Catholics (57.7%) are the Pentecostal/Charismatic groups (21.7%) and Protestants (12.3%). The regional picture is replicated in all the districts (irrespective of the size of the Christian population) except Bawku West where the Pentecostal/Charismatic group constitutes the majority of Christian population.

Educational Attainment And Literacy

The high correlation between levels of education and positive health and other social indicators makes education a very important variable in any development planning at the district level. Higher education, especially of women, is usually associated with greater knowledge and use of sound health practices and family planning methods. Successive governments introduced various policies aimed at reducing illiteracy among the population to the barest minimum. The current programme of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) is supposed to guarantee free education to all children of school going age.

Although the information on school attendance was collected for everybody aged 3 years or older, official school entry age in the country is 6 years. The analysis therefore focuses mainly on the school attendance of persons aged 6 years and older, while the data for the 3-5 years are presented to show the extent of pre-schooling, which has become official policy, but is not fully enforced. Of the total of 19,469 children aged 3-5 years in the region who are in school, 77.2 per cent are in pre-school and 22.8 per cent are in primary school.

While the start-up for primary school is age 6, a few pupils start at age 5. The proportion of boys (76.5%) and girls (77.9%) who are in pre-school is about the same. For the country as a whole, the proportion of the population that has ever attended school is 60.4 per cent (66.2% of males and 54.8% of females).

The gap in the educational attainment between the country and the region is still very wide. The lack of education in the region is not due only to general poverty and cultural practices but also to the very late introduction of education into the region.

Marital affiliation

Information on marital status is applicable to persons 12 years or older. The eligibility for this question is “based on the average age of menarche and also on the practice in some parts of the country where girls as young as 12 years old could be given in marriage” (Ghana Statistical Service, March 2002). Since 92.3 per cent of the population aged 12-14 are never married, however, the data on marital status are presented only for the population 15 years or older.

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